

# Republic of Korea Forces in Iraq: Peacekeeping and Reconstruction

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**O**N 30 JANUARY 2005, the historic national election in Iraq resulted in the appointment of the Iraqi Constituent National Assembly. Election results mitigated domestic conflict between ethnic and religious groups and put into place the political process to establish a new Iraqi government. Under the authority of the 2004 UN Security Council Resolution 1546, Multinational Force-Iraq (MNF-I) moved from conducting offensive operations against anti-Iraqi forces (AIF) to developing the Iraqi Security Force (ISF) to allow the political process to proceed unhindered. The goals for Iraq's future were—

- To secure the future political climate.
- To develop an ISF capable of independent operations.
- To help the Iraqi people establish an Iraqi democracy.

The change in policy emphasized civil-military operations (CMO) and reconstruction over offensive military operations.

## The Republic of Korea's (ROK's) Mission in Iraq

In September 2004, the ROK Army deployed its Zaytun Division to the Irbil region in northern Iraq to provide CMO and reconstruction support for 6 months, establish friendly relations with the provincial government, donate critical materials to ISF troops and Iraqi civilians, and work to stabilize the region through humanitarian assistance to help guarantee freedom to participate in the national elections.

Activated in February 2004, the Division supported Operation Iraqi Freedom by maintaining security in its assigned area of responsibility (AOR), conducting postwar reconstruction projects, and providing humanitarian assistance. The Division prepared for CMO by organizing subordinate units, including an engineer battalion for reconstruction support, a medical battalion for humanitarian

assistance, and four trained and organized multifunctional special operations battalions to perform a variety of missions.

Because of the emphasis on CMO, the Division activated a Civil-Military Coordination Center (CIMIC), directly subordinate to the commanding general, to coordinate between the Division and external agencies for reconstruction support. The Division focused on how to efficiently conduct CMO and reconstruction in the area of operations with limited funds, and it established these directives:

- Build friendships with local residents to establish CMO during the early stage of deployment.
- Identify local residents' most critical requirements before conducting CMO.
- Establish a plan for peacekeeping and reconstruction, taking into account the Division's capabilities and the provincial government's requirements.

To establish friendship with local agencies and residents quickly, the Division instilled awareness of regional societal and cultural norms through education about the region's indigenous religions, customs, languages, and lifestyles and provided opportunities for soldiers interested in Islam to visit mosques in Korea. ROK soldiers gained an understanding of Islamic and Kurdish cultures and customs and learned some simple Kurdish idioms.

Before deployment, the Division invited the Iraqi Olympic soccer team to Seoul to participate in a match hosted by the Division. The Division also invited the prime minister of the regional government to Korea to actively exchange opinions and build a relationship between government and Division officials.

The Division employed three predeployment site survey (PDSS) teams to establish deployment plans and evaluate CMO prerequisites. The teams received seven support program requests from

the provincial government for support for local infrastructure development, ISF support, and expressway construction.

## CMO and Reconstruction

With CIMIC analysis and requirements, the Division developed 67 tasks in 4 areas of support: friendship building, ISF support, humanitarian assistance, and infrastructure-development support. The Division planned and trained for each task, dividing the tasks into those a battalion could conduct independently and those that required government support. The Division established employment plans, allocated funds and materials, and identified additional educational requirements. With support from external agencies, CMO personnel received specialized training for projects such as establishing a vocational training center, a multifunctional task force, and the New Village Movement.

The Division prioritized CMO support for the local security force based on a regional support concept that distinguished between urban and rural regions. The Division conducted operations in three phases (stabilization, implementation, and development), establishing specific objectives for each phase. To make a quick, positive impact, the Division built friendships with local residents through sporting events and other CMO activities, maintained security through ISF support, and focused operations on critical life-support material donation and humanitarian support for the needy. After constructing Camp Zaytun, the Division launched full-scale CMO and reconstruction support operations, gradually increasing the level of support for infrastructure development throughout the region.

**Building friendships.** The Division required soldiers to show respect for local customs and culture during CMO activities. Early friendship-building activities focused on establishing relationships between key Division officials and local leaders. The Division also established a mutual cooperation committee, which met regularly to hear the needs of the people, plan more effective CMO activities, and implement the We Are Friends campaign to narrow the cultural gap between ROK soldiers and locals. The program's goal was to create a friendly image of the Division as a peacekeeping and reconstruction support force, not an occupation force.

The campaign emphasized the acceptance of other religions, instructed soldiers to greet residents in their native language, and encouraged soldiers to participate in sporting events. The Division hosted a soccer tournament for regional high-school teams and invited them to South Korea to participate in

matches with Korean school teams.

Tae Kwon Do, a traditional Korean martial art, was also used as a tool to broaden understanding between the two cultures. The Division opened five Tae Kwon Do training centers, hosted regional Tae Kwon Do tournaments, and conducted belt evaluation tests.

Operation Green Angel enhanced mutual understanding by providing local people opportunities to learn about traditional Korean culture. One of my favorite memories was attending the Korean-Kurdish Friendship Night at Camp Zaytun to which key local figures had been invited to listen to Korean and Kurdish traditional music.

To build a deeper understanding of Korean culture, the Division conducted basic Korean-language education and scheduled soccer and Tae Kwon Do matches with trainees of vocational schools and local residents who worked as interpreters. The Division encouraged voluntary, progressive cooperation with the Kurds by constantly informing local residents of the Division's CMO and reconstruction mission.

**ISF support.** The MNF-I set a goal for the Division: improve ISF capabilities to where the Iraqis could conduct independent counterinsurgency operations to further the goal of establishing a democratic government. To meet this goal, the Division's top priority was to coordinate with the coalition to support the ISF with essential equipment to establish quick-response capabilities and command and control (C2) structures. The Division then shifted focus to improving the ISF's work environment by building and renovating ISF facilities, increasing ISF capabilities by providing training programs, and employing the Peshmerga Transition Office (PTO) throughout the area of operations.

To enhance regional security, the Division conducted donation ceremonies for the Iraqi Army and ISF. The ISF's mobility and quick-reaction capabilities, although hampered by severe shortages, greatly improved as a result of donated equipment. The Division improved communication with the ISF by supplying new communications equipment to establish C2 within the region. Because of the equipment the Division provided, the ISF increased its capabilities to search out and destroy anti-Iraqi forces attempting to infiltrate the region.

After strengthening the ISF's combat capability through equipment and materiel support, the Division, with help from coalition forces, began improving ISF headquarters, building training facilities, and providing training programs. To improve living and working conditions, the Division built billets and checkpoints for ISF and Zarvani

forces. The Division also built gyms and rifle ranges and renovated ISF facilities to improve the quality of ISF training.

After the main effort shifted to cultivating the ISF, the task of supporting the ISF and providing training became paramount. With ROK forces constrained from offensive operations, the Division and U.S. Special Forces trained Iraqi Army (IA) brigade and battalion officers. With the help of embedded U.S. and ROK advisers, the newly qualified IA officers trained IA soldiers in C2, troop-leading procedures, and staff responsibilities. (The IA battalion went on to conduct highly successful counterinsurgency operations with U.S. Special Forces in the Mosul area.)

The Division constructed a police training center to train recruits in three policing areas: regular, public order, and criminal investigation. The primary focus for regular and crime investigation police was on crime prevention and investigation techniques. The public order police focused primarily on security and escort techniques.

Complying with the Iraqi central government's policy to disarm regional militias, the Division helped establish the PTO within the region to deactivate the Peshmerga, the regional government's militia. In 2004, 300 Peshmerga became forest rangers; in 2005, 800 entered the civilian job market, and 900 became members of an IA battalion.

The Division faced some difficulties during the ISF support process. Because of limited coordination with coalition forces in the early stages of ISF support, support channels overlapped in several areas. Also, because of a lack of motivation and little demand for Peshmerga in the civilian job market, only a limited number of Peshmerga transitioned into the civilian market or became regular security force members.

To overcome these obstacles, the Division closely coordinated with coalition forces and the regional government to estimate local project requirements. Related agencies agreed to hold regular Provincial Coordination Center meetings to prevent redundant support. The Division continues to push the PTO project through the Ministry of Interior and the Iraqi National Government.

**Humanitarian assistance.** In the early stages of the humanitarian mission, the Division emphasized quick-impact projects to create an image as humanitarian-assistance soldiers. The Division donated essential items to the regional government and schools, employed its multifunctional task force to conduct Operation Green Angel, and used PDSS teams to identify items and material local residents needed. The teams also donated office and school supplies (computers, copiers, chairs,

desks, and so on) to be distributed by the regional government. The Division distributed medical supplies directly to rural residents and provided cold-weather equipment, including heaters and carpets, to religious facilities.

Humanitarian-assistance activities began in earnest in November 2004 with the opening of Zaytun Hospital, which treats about 150 patients a day and provides transportation from an assembly area in the city to the hospital. The Division coordinated with public health agencies within the region and selected low-income residents to receive medical passes. The hospital has received unabashed praise from local residents despite the facility's limitations.

The Division also operates mobile clinics in rural areas for residents who cannot visit the hospital on their own. The clinics provide detailed medical examinations for patients as well as treatment for minor illnesses and injuries. To improve health care throughout the region, the Division staff offers follow-on medical passes to patients for use at the hospital. The Division donated medical supplies, equipment, medicine, and vaccines to health centers too distant for the mobile clinics to reach.

When compared to other CMO missions, humanitarian assistance requires a greater number of soldiers to reassure local residents and establish a positive image. Because of concerns about vulnerability to AIF attacks during Operation Green Angel, the Division put the highest priority on force protection before conducting CMO in the region.

**Infrastructure development.** The Division improved the region's infrastructure by upgrading the water supply and waste water treatment facilities, constructing schools, launching the New Village Movement, opening literacy schools and a vocational training center, and providing medical training and election support. Because of the great need for improved and expanded facilities, the Division constructed deep wells, water tanks, and supply facilities.

*Water supply and sewage treatment.* Waste water treatment and sewage is an issue that all of Iraq faces. In most regions, waste water is out in the open, which leads to environmental pollution and sanitation hazards. In 2004, the Division improved the sewer system in one region, and similar projects are underway in nine other villages. In addition, after a thorough review, the Korean International Coordination Agency (KOICA) built large-scale sewer and water treatment facilities. Some trainees from the region were invited to South Korea for additional training.

*School construction.* The Division is currently building schools in 22 locations and will also

construct 7 educational centers. Eventually, in coordination with the KOICA, these educational centers will be expanded, and clinics and two hospital wards will be built to improve medical support within the region.

*New Village Movement.* The New Village Movement, patterned after an initiative in Korea responsible for economic success there, focused on creating a better environment and increasing income through public participation. The Division provided materials for water-supply and sewage facilities, building maintenance, and waste disposal so the Iraqi people could begin projects to improve their environment.

In the first phase of the New Village Movement, a New Village Movement committee, formed in coordination with the regional government, selected 20 people from different villages to train at a New Village Movement training institute. The Division trained local people in agriculture, livestock farming techniques, and technical skills; invited experts to help with the training process; and invited promising trainees to Korea for advanced training. Training imparts valuable skills that will increase income and help fuel the economy.

*Literacy schools.* Saddam Hussein's regime suppressed the primary education of the people, which caused a high rate of illiteracy. To reduce this rate, the Division opened literacy schools, employed local teachers, and supplied them with required materials. Eight classes in two schools opened in November 2004. A month later, in response to the local ministry's request, 35 classes in 9 schools existed. As of March 2005, the Division operated 85 classes in 18 schools with a total of 2,200 students. The literacy initiative is a major success story of maximizing CMO through efficient financial and material support, and the program will be expanded to include 3,000 students in 130 classes throughout the region. If success continues as anticipated, the current illiteracy rate of 82 percent will be below 20 percent within the next 5 years.

Literacy school graduates will receive further training at the Zaytun Vocational Training Center and Irbil Vocational Training Center to enhance their employability. The Division is also training trainers to improve the program's educational quality.

The Division supported local vocational training by providing courseware for the local center and constructing a training center that offers seven courses: vehicle maintenance, farm equipment repair, household electronics repair, computer classes, heavy vehicle operations, vehicle driving, and baking. To facilitate education, the Division translated all courseware into Kurdish and sup-

plied buses for commuting. The residents have responded positively to the Division's vocational training programs, and the regional government has guaranteed job opportunities for graduates.

*Medical training.* The hospital conducts an internship program to impart medical expertise to doctors and nurses recommended by Iraq's Ministry of Health and Welfare. Interns are taught advanced medical techniques and work alongside the medical staff for 2 months. The Division also encourages its doctors to participate in local medical seminars to present advanced medical techniques and to hold discussion groups with interns.

Construction, education, sanitation, and medical support depend on the availability of personnel. Therefore, the KOICA selected students to train in Korea. About 200 trainees, including regional government officials, have graduated from the KOICA training program. In the future, ROK experts in architecture, design, sanitation, welfare, agriculture, and other disciplines could travel to Iraq to impart their expertise.

*Election support.* Election support is one of the major tasks required for regional stabilization and the development of democracy. Increased threats before the general elections prompted close coordination among the Division, the regional government, and local security agencies. According to MNF-I guidance, the Division avoided direct election support. Instead, it provided protective materials such as barricades and, with the Independent Electoral Committee of Iraq (IECI) and local security agencies, helped coordinate convoys.

During the general elections, the Division established communication networks with IECI, Osprey Assets Management, and the regional government Ministry of Interior. Quick-reaction forces, medics, and explosive ordnance disposal teams were on constant standby. The Division's help resulted in the safest elections in Iraq's history.

## Assessment

The Division constantly strives to enhance its relationship with local leaders and residents, establish close coordination relationships with the regional government for reconstruction efforts, and give priority to regional government projects and those the people request. And, the Division contributed to the region's economic development by employing local residents for reconstruction projects.

The Division did encounter problems. Some reconstruction efforts focused on only a few regions because of the short time available to assess CMO requirements. Some completed projects did not meet expectations because local companies lacked technical and business expertise. To overcome



these problems, the Division thoroughly reviewed and coordinated projects with the KOICA and other agencies before implementation, thereby improving local companies' technical expertise.

A lack of participation by local residents hindered the New Village Movement's early progress. The Division learned that instead of directly involving villagers in the movement, it would have been better to have established a close relationship with regional government agencies to involve the villagers. Even so, villagers expressed gratitude to the Division for its constant support in developing their capabilities. The director of education for Irbil thanked the Zaytun soldiers, saying that the people hoped the Division would consider Kurdistan its second home.

The Division encountered difficulties despite thorough preparation before and after dispatching troops and coordinating with the regional government and other agencies. Extreme, unpredictable weather hindered reconstruction efforts. Some projects were delayed because of a limited time in which to prepare materials.

Before the elections, mounting terrorist threats affected CMO. Green Angel activities and Korea Day operations, which involved a large number of personnel and local residents, were either cancelled or delayed. Local customs and traditions also limited the effective execution of CMO. Most Iraqis avoided giving definitive answers during coordination meetings, and in many cases, deadlines could not be met because of holidays. For example, during the month-long Ramadan period, CMO were almost impossible.

Difficulties with the New Village Movement ranged from selecting projects to getting people to participate in them. To overcome these difficulties, the Division continued small projects, hired competent local residents, carried out CMO inside Camp Zaytun, and donated materials to Iraqis on a regular basis. With robust publicity, the friendly atmosphere continued.

## Lessons Learned

The first lesson learned from planning and executing CMO was the importance of building friendships with local residents. All Division troops conducted humanitarian assistance and friendship-building activities based on an awareness of and

respect toward indigenous cultures and customs, thereby building an image of the coalition force as a humanitarian assistance force. Efforts to facilitate interaction and to identify requirements resulted in positive responses from the Iraqis. Attempts to understand cultural and religious customs helped open people's minds and encouraged their active participation.

The second lesson the Division learned was that it is more important to support the regional government and the people in reconstruction efforts than to do it for them. Support to stability and IECI (such as providing necessary equipment, materials, and training) helped local security forces maintain stability and contributed to the election's success, a success that gave local residents hope that they could improve their lives through their own efforts and will. Literacy programs, the Zaytun Vocational Training Center, and the New Village Movement imparted the knowledge to ensure long-term economic development.

The third lesson learned was the significance of public affairs operations. The Division public affairs office (PAO) provided timely information on reconstruction activities, boosted the morale of the soldiers, and played a pivotal role in building friendships by promoting CMO and reconstruction activities. The PAO maintained close coordination with local broadcasting media and published newspapers in Kurdish and English for distribution to regional government agencies, local residents, and students.

The Division accomplished CMO's initial goals within 6 months of its deployment, provided reconstruction support throughout the Division's AOR, and overcame obstacles by easing the fears of local people by conducting friendly activities and respecting local culture, religion, and customs. Though trial and error, the Division learned valuable lessons that will be the foundation for conducting more effective CMO in the future.

Iraq is trying to overcome the pain of war and move forward to establish a new government. Coalition forces must help Iraqis move in the right direction. The Zaytun Division will continue to support the Iraqi Government and properly equip Iraqis to build a democratic, independent country. **MR**

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